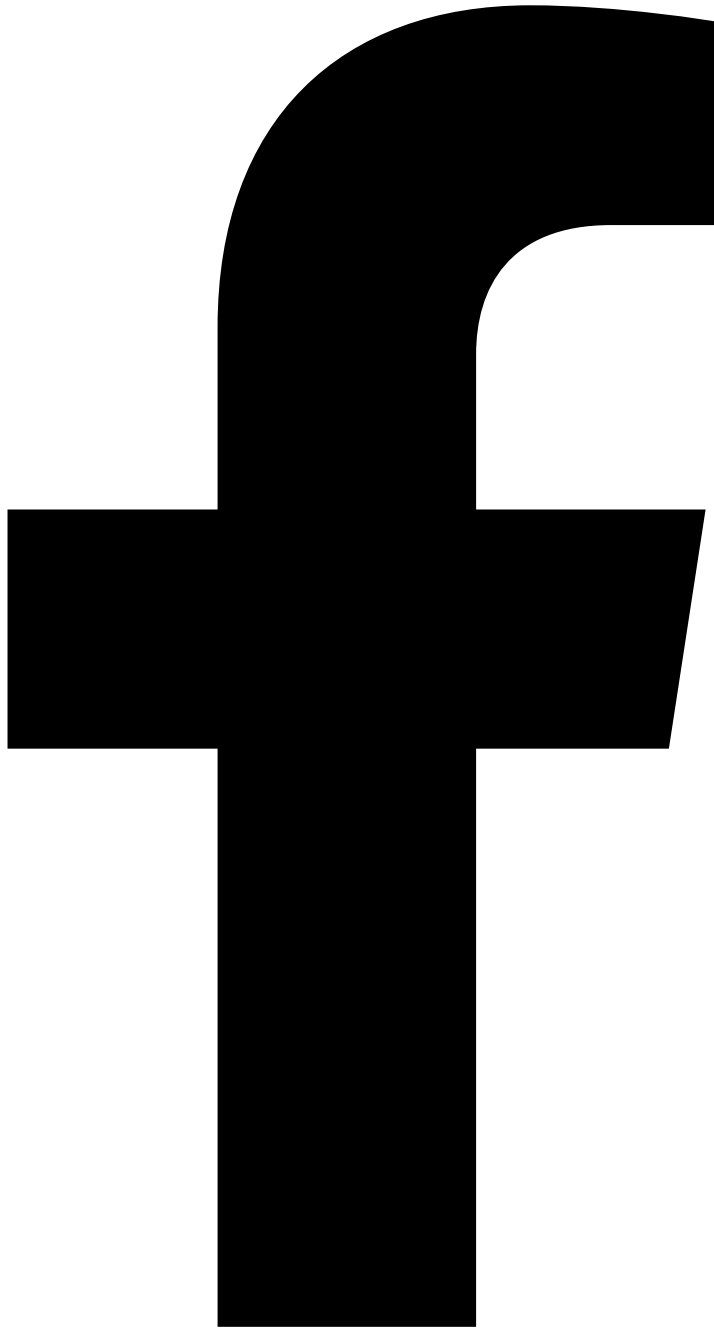


# Over 2,500 kids disappeared from asylum centers in 10 years



Bunk beds. (Photo HKYHA/ Wikimedia Commons)

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Over the past decade, more than 2,500 children disappeared from asylum centers in the Netherlands, NRC reports based on figures from the Central agency for the reception of asylum seekers COA and guardianship institution Nidos. The COA registered these children as left “with an unknown destination”.

Over 11,700 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in the Netherlands in the past decade. At least 2,556 of these children left the asylum centers before their asylum procedure was completed, and without the authorities knowing where they went. This number may be even higher, according to NRC, because NIOD did not provide figures for the period between 2011 and 2014.

“Part of them maybe traveled to relatives elsewhere in the Netherlands or Europe, but it is also possible that children were picked up by a human trafficker,” Nadia Magdache, who works at an asylum center for unaccompanied minors in Oisterwijk, said to the newspaper. The center in Oisterwijk had 177 children disappear in the last ten years, the highest number after the major asylum center in Ter Apel.

The Netherlands first really became aware of human trafficking networks in the country in the 1990s, when many Nigerian girls disappeared from Dutch shelters, according to the newspaper. Since then, various measures were taken, including registering girls immediately upon arrival, keeping a closer eye on the, and protected shelters established in undisclosed locations.

COA employees are now also being trained to recognize signals of children who were recruited into prostitution or drug trafficking, such as withdrawn behavior, new clothing, expensive devices. But in practice, there is not much they can do about the disappearances, the employees said to the newspaper. Occasionally they see men hanging around asylum centers, but hanging around is not illegal. Mainly they take down license plates of suspicious cars, so that they can give this to the police if something happens.

The Dutch authorities have become more alert to human trafficking. But given its good infrastructure and open asylum centers, the Netherlands is still a country from which young people can easily be picked up, according to NRC.

There will always be people who take advantage of others’ vulnerability, Kees Wezenberg said to the newspaper. He is the deputy unit manager in Zeeland and West-Brabant, and responsible for the asylum center in Oisterwijk. He believes people should focus more on things that go well. “Most of them are doing well under the circumstances,” he said about the child asylum seekers in the center.

The center mainly houses adolescents with big dreams for the future and many uncertainties, he said. But as they are asylum seekers’, any wrongdoings are

quickly noticed. “If our children do something, it will stand out even more. When a 15-year-old at the Koning Willem I College in Den Bosch picks up a pack of cigarettes, you never hear about it.”

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Source:

<https://nltimes.nl/2020/01/13/2500-kids-disappeared-asylum-centers-10-years>

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